A retractable card carrying holder is provided for retention of identification cards, particularly for use when traveling through security checkpoints. The photo ID card(s) can be disposed within a transparent sleeve which is attached by a retractable tether to an opaque enclosure into which it is operatively associated, which enclosure includes a clip or other fastener operatively associated thereto to clip onto a belt, backpack, luggage, a wearer, or other clothing. Preferably, at least one of the sleeve or the enclosure is sufficiently non-deformable to inhibit or avoid damage to the card(s). Methods using the card(s) are also included.
Fig. 1
RETRACTABLE IDENTIFICATION HOLDER AND METHODS OF USING SAME

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The invention relates to a retractable identification-card case including a transparent sleeve for holding one or more identification cards that are retractably disposed in an opaque enclosure or is disposed in a pivotably operable enclosure, as well as methods of displaying identification cards using the same.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Clearing security checkpoints has become more burdensome when traveling in the current era of heightened security, as identification cards must be shown frequently. In particular, airport security requires travelers to display identification cards a plurality of times before boarding an aircraft. Various devices exist for holding and/or displaying cards or information of one kind or another, including the following.

[0003] U.S. Pat. No. 1,699,865 discloses a leather article carrier or holder used for carrying keys having an outside pocket for a driver’s license card, a central portion with a backing and reinforcing plate to prevent collapsing of the holder and bending or distortion of the card.

[0004] U.S. Pat. No. 3,677,154 discloses an identification card and holder in the form of an apertured sheet of material carrying a holographic transparency at a perforation for holding data such as a fingerprint, and a holder in the form of an envelope with apertures.

[0005] U.S. Pat. No. 3,958,690 discloses a medical identification, information, and emergency medication packet for wearing or carrying by a patient that includes a preferably transparent envelope, a foldable information card slidably inserted in the envelope, and a frame within the card so as to house a dosage quantity of a desired medication.

[0006] U.S. Pat. No. 4,322,001 discloses a case for protecting collectible articles including photographs and baseball cards. The case includes a base and a cover, preferably both constructed from transparent elastic material, that have interlocking components to snap fit together.

[0007] U.S. Pat. No. 4,915,215 discloses a carrying case for business cards and the like that is removable securable to a piece of material. The case includes a body having first and second side members having a cavity therebetween sized to receive cards, and an element that projects from an interior surface opposite a slot for constricting the cavity width to maintain the cards in the case.

[0008] U.S. Pat. No. 4,942,913 discloses a separate sub-wallet incorporated within a conventional wallet that can be removed and used when the full wallet is unneeded. The sub-wallet can include identification papers in the credit card compartment. A side edge compartment can have a transparent outer panel to permit visibility therein, and a form of identification such as a driver’s license can be observed without requiring removal from the wallet.

[0009] U.S. Pat. No. 4,979,619 discloses a transparent plastic case for protective long term storage of sports cards, including front and rear panels cohesively sealed to enclose a sports and a documentation card.

[0010] U.S. Pat. No. 5,461,810 discloses a holder for protectively displaying flat objects using a jacket formed from two rectangular sheets of semi-rigid transparent plastic and sealed along three edges. The holder is received and displayed within a pouch-like retainer member having a centered display aperture.

[0011] U.S. Pat. No. 5,524,749 discloses a safety card case for retaining machine readable cards in an enclosure having an openable access, which cards are fastened to the end of a flexible tether that is attached at the other end to a spring loaded reel assembly mounted in a the back portion of the card case enclosure.

[0012] U.S. Pat. No. 5,938,010 discloses a multi-purpose holding device to efficiently removably maintain a plurality of cards and other documents, which device includes an overall rectangular configuration having a base wall with channels on one side for removably receiving cards and a stop means for prevent stored items from falling.

[0013] U.S. Pat. No. 6,105,294 discloses a card carrying case including a U-shaped housing and an insert for insertion therein and a belt clip for mounting the case on a belt.

[0014] U.S. Pat. No. 6,149,003 discloses a system for protecting collectible cards and the like using a transparent, sealed card holder to hold the card and an authentication certificate and to prevent removal thereof. A light impervious pouch receives the card holder to protect against fading. The pouch includes a transparent window to view the certificate, and a flap covering the opening in the pouch into which the card holder is inserted.

[0015] Despite the variety of holders and display devices, nothing available provides sufficient protection and ease of use for the modern-day traveler, particularly when passing airport security checkpoints. Thus, it is desired to provide an improved article and method for displaying identification when traveling from one place to another.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0016] The invention relates to a retractable identification-card holder including a transparent sleeve that is configured and dimensioned to receive one or more identification cards, an opaque enclosure having an interior that is configured and dimensioned to removably store the sleeve and card(s) therein, a retraction mechanism that is operatively associated with the sleeve and the enclosure without damaging the card(s) to facilitate the return of the sleeve and card(s) to the enclosure after being displayed by a user, and at least one fastener operatively associated with the enclosure to attach the card holder to the user, wherein at least one of the sleeve or the enclosure is sufficiently non-deformable to inhibit or avoid damage to the card(s).

[0017] In one embodiment, the enclosure is fastened in a fixed position on at least one of a a piece of the user, a piece of clothing on the user, a backpack, a purse, a briefcase, a pouch, a money belt, a suitcase, or a combination thereof. In a preferred embodiment, the enclosure is wearable and is fastened on a belt, belt buckle, belt loop, or around a user’s neck. The at least one fastener preferably includes a hook and loop type closure, a clip, a cord, or a combination thereof sufficient to securely fasten the holder to the desired fixed position.
[0018] In one embodiment, the retraction mechanism includes a spring-loaded reel assembly. In a preferred embodiment, the reel assembly is disposed inside the enclosure and the retraction mechanism includes a flexible tether connected at one end to the reel assembly and at the other end to the sleeve, the card, or both, and is arranged to be selectively extended from an opening in the enclosure and retracted into a position wound around the reel assembly after being temporarily removed. In a more preferred embodiment, when used the tether is attached to the sleeve and not the card. In one embodiment, the flexible tether includes a string, a cord, a line, flexible tape, metal chain, or a combination thereof. In a preferred embodiment, the flexible tether includes a line having at least one thread or filament and comprising a polyamide polymer. In yet another preferred embodiment, the flexible tether is attached at the other end to the sleeve by a split ring device therein. Preferably, the invention further includes at least one additional sleeve to store and display at least one of the one or more identification cards separately from the card(s) in the transparent sleeve.

[0019] In one embodiment, the card holder is configured and dimensioned to store a single identification card. In a preferred embodiment, the holder is configured and dimensioned to store a photo identification card, preferably a government-issued photo identification card. In a preferred embodiment, the enclosure is sufficiently non-deformable and the sleeve is deformable. In a more preferred embodiment, the enclosure is made of metal and includes stainless steel, tin, bronze, brass, aluminum, or a combination thereof. Preferably, the enclosure is sufficiently opaque to avoid viewing any information on the card(s) while in the enclosure. In a more preferred embodiment, the enclosure is sufficiently opaque to avoid viewing any information on the card(s) while in the enclosure and the sleeve is transparent to permit viewing of the card(s) therein once the sleeve is temporarily removed from the enclosure. In one preferred embodiment, the enclosure has no lid and a permanent opening lid in an upward facing direction to facilitate frequent removal and retraction of the sleeve and card(s) with the opening configured and dimensioned to minimize inadvertent removal of the sleeve and card(s) from the enclosure.

[0020] The invention also relates to an identification-card holder including a transparent sleeve that is configured and dimensioned to receive one or more identification cards, an opaque enclosure having an inside that is configured and dimensioned to store the sleeve and card(s) therein and having a pivotably openable portion to display the one or more cards, and at least one fastener operatively associated with the enclosure to attach the card holder to a user or their clothing, wherein at least one of the sleeve or the enclosure is sufficiently non-deformable to inhibit or avoid damage to the card(s). Various embodiments described above are also applicable to this aspect of the invention.

[0021] In one embodiment, the pivotably openable portion includes a hinge across the top or bottom of the holder and a portion of the enclosure that covers the identification card(s) and opens the enclosure to an open state to permit viewing of at least one of the one or more cards. In a preferred embodiment, the pivotably openable portion includes a spring mechanism arranged to return the openable portion to a closed state to inhibit viewing of the card(s).

[0022] The invention also relates to a method of displaying an identification card including providing an identification card retained in a transparent article which is retractably disposed in an opaque article attached to the user or the user’s clothing, removing the transparent article having the card retained therein from the opaque article, and displaying the transparent article so as to see the identification card. In a preferred embodiment, the method further includes retracting the transparent article into the opaque article to prohibit undesired viewing of the card therein.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0023] Further features and advantages of the invention can be ascertained from the following detailed description that is provided in connection with the drawing(s) described below:

[0024] FIG. 1 is a front view of an identification card in a sleeve according to the invention;

[0025] FIG. 2 is a front view of a sleeve retractably removable from the opaque enclosure according to the invention; and

[0026] FIG. 3 is a front cut-away view of a case showing a retraction mechanism according to the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0027] An improved retractable identification card case has now been discovered to provide travelers with an elegant, simplified solution to the problem of conveniently displaying their identification to official personnel, or as desired, without needing to repeatedly remove it from a wallet, handbag, backpack, purse or other conventional storage device, while keeping the identification protected from physical damage and preferably concealed from prying eyes at other times. The invention can also greatly reduce the inconvenience of losing such identification while passing through repeated checkpoints, which can result in delayed or even canceled ability to travel or move from one place to another through such checkpoints. Such travel can include domestic or international air travel, cruise ships, other international travel, school or workplace attendance, or even government buildings.

[0028] The invention relates to a retractable identification-card case including a transparent sleeve that is configured and dimensioned to receive one or more identification cards, an opaque enclosure having an inside that is configured and dimensioned to store the sleeve and card(s) therein, and at least one fastener operatively associated with the enclosure to attach the card case to the user, wherein at least one of the sleeve or the enclosure is sufficiently non-deformable to inhibit or avoid damage to the card(s). Much of the discussion herein refers to only a single identification card for the sake of simplicity, but it should be understood that the invention encompasses embodiments where more than one card can be stored in the sleeve. In one embodiment, the sleeve and card are removably stored in the enclosure and a retraction mechanism is provided that is operatively associated with the sleeve and the enclosure without damaging the card to facilitate the return of the sleeve and card to the enclosure after being displayed by a user. In another embodiment, the opaque enclosure includes a pivotably openable portion to display the card and transparent sleeve.
The identification card can be any suitable card to identify the user, including those containing information magnetically coded or encoded in a magnetic strip or electronically coded or encoded in a microchip. Preferably, the card is a photo identification card that can be presented upon request or as desired when traveling from one place to another, i.e., through security checkpoints, into a secure building or room, or the like. In a more preferred embodiment, the card is a government issued photo identification card. An exemplary card is a driver’s license or a passport. The card case is preferably as small as possible to avoid inconvenience to the user. With a driver’s license, for example, the entire case including fastener can be less than about 7 mm thick, and the case itself can have a thickness of less than about 4 mm. An enclosure for a passport would have to be somewhat thicker due to the multiple pages contained in the typical passport.

The sleeve is typically sufficiently transparent to permit the card to be stored and protected therein while remaining visible for display. Any suitable material may be used, for example, including polyethylene. The sleeve can be non-deformable or flexible, and preferably it is flexible to facilitate insertion of the card therein and to help the sleeve conform to the card. The sleeve is configured and dimensioned to receive more than one photo identification card, but in a preferred embodiment is configured and dimensioned to receive a single identification card. The sleeve can also optionally, but preferably, include a cutout of material where the card therein sticks out for ease of insertion and removal when there is no longer any need of the invention, for example, at the end of the travel during which identification is required to be displayed. For example, the cutout can be a semicircle of sufficient size to permit the user to grasp the card itself for removal from the sleeve if so desired.

The enclosure is sufficiently opaque to inhibit or prevent undesired viewing of information on the card therein, such as by a grifter or other con artist. The enclosure is configured and dimensioned to store at least the sleeve and card therein. Thus, the enclosure is preferably sufficiently opaque to avoid viewing any information on the card while in the enclosure and the sleeve is sufficiently transparent to permit viewing of the card therein once the sleeve is temporarily removed from the enclosure for display. In one preferred embodiment, the retraction mechanism can be stored inside the enclosure, although it may also be disposed anywhere on or in the enclosure. When the retraction mechanism is stored inside, the enclosure is sized to house the sleeve, card, and the mechanism.

The enclosure is preferably sufficiently non-deformable so as to inhibit or prevent damage to the card. For example, the enclosure can be rigid so that it will not flex under normal usage. In a preferred embodiment, the enclosure can be formed of stainless steel, tin, bronze, brass, aluminum, or a combination thereof. The enclosure typically has a permanent opening and preferably has no lid, preferably in an upward facing direction to facilitate frequent removal and retraction of the sleeve and card while minimizing the chance that the sleeve and card will fall out of the enclosure. The opening can be to either side, as well, although the risk of card loss may be increased. Optionally, but preferably, the enclosure can include a small bulge or small opening if needed to include the retraction mechanism therein or to permit space for a ring attached to the sleeve when inserted in the enclosure, respectively.

The retraction mechanism can be any suitable device to facilitate retraction of the card and sleeve back into the enclosure, including one or more of an elastic line or thread, a guide means to facilitate return of the sleeve and card, a spring-loaded reel assembly, or the like. When a reel assembly is used, it is typically disposed inside the enclosure. The retraction mechanism can include a flexible tether, typically having a length of about 3 inches to 6 feet, preferably about 6 inches to 4 feet. In a preferred embodiment, the tether can be about 1 foot to three feet in length. The flexible tether is typically connected at one end to the reel assembly and at the other end to the sleeve and card, and is arranged to be selectively extended from an opening in the enclosure and retracted into a position wound around the reel assembly after being temporarily removed for display of the card. The flexible tether can include a line, flexible tape, metal chain, or a combination thereof. Preferably, the flexible tether includes a line having at least one thread or filament comprising a polyamide polymer. It is desired to have one end of the flexible tether permanently attached to the sleeve to inhibit or avoid loss of the sleeve and card upon repeated displays of the card therein to access or pass various checkpoints. For example, the flexible tether can be attached to the sleeve by a split ring device therein. Preferably, the flexible tether and even the entire retraction mechanism as a whole are designed to avoid any permanent injury or damage to the card. This can be particularly important when the card is a government issued photo identification card. It should be understood, however, that the flexible tether of the retraction mechanism could be attached to the card(s), the sleeve, or both, if the flexible tether is attached so that the card(s) are not damaged. For example, a clip could be attached to the card(s), or the card(s) and sleeve, that would function to retract the card(s) and sleeve without damaging the card(s).

In one embodiment, instead of including a retractably removable sleeve having the card therein, the enclosure can include a pivotably openable portion. Preferably, the enclosure of this embodiment can include a hinge across the top or bottom of the case and a portion of the enclosure that covers the identification card in a closed state and opens the enclosure to an open state to permit viewing of the card when desired. Preferably, the enclosure includes a spring mechanism arranged to return the openable portion to the closed state to inhibit viewing of the card. A completely separate sleeve need not be used in this embodiment, as an enclosure including a pocket having a transparent wall on at least one side to contain the card against a wall of the enclosure will serve to permit viewing of the card when the pivotably openable portion is in the open state. The portion of the enclosure that pivots can have any angle between the closed and opened states that is sufficient to permit rapid viewing of the identification card therein. For example, angles of 60°, 90°, or 120° can be selected, and the pivotable portion can have a stop of some sort to prevent the enclosure from being opened further. The pivotable portion of the enclosure can also optionally have a sealing mechanism to help keep the enclosure closed until it is desired to be opened. This sealing mechanism can include a latch, lever, snap, magnetic button, or the like, or a combination thereof.
In either the retractable or pivotably openable embodiments, the entire enclosure may be movable to bring the card closer to the viewer while the enclosure is still fastened to the body or another object. Preferably, the enclosure is fastened in a fixed position on at least one of a part of the user, a piece of clothing on the user, a backpack, a purse, a briefcase, a pouch, a money belt, a suitcase, or a combination thereof. More preferably, the enclosure is wearable by the user for convenience when passing through multiple security checkpoints in a short period of time, e.g., an airport. The card case is thus preferably fastened on a belt, belt buckle, belt loop, or around a user’s neck. The at least one fastener preferably includes a hook and loop type closure, a clip, a cord, or the like, or a combination thereof, sufficient to securely fasten the case to the desired position.

The invention also relates to a method of displaying an identification card including providing an identification card retained in a transparent article which is retractably disposed in an opaque article attached to the user or the user’s clothing, removing the transparent article having the card retained therein from the opaque article, and displaying the transparent article so as to see the identification card. A similar method of display using the pivotably openable enclosure is also encompassed by the invention. In a preferred embodiment, the method further includes retracting the transparent article into the opaque article to prohibit undesired viewing of the card therein. This method of displaying an identification card according to the invention can advantageously reduce or avoid the opportunity to lose the card, can facilitate repeated displays of the card to authorized persons, can inhibit or avoid the viewing of card information when retracted or closed into the enclosure, and the like, as well as combinations thereof.

FIG. 1 is a front view of an identification card 1 that can be retractably disposed in a sleeve 5 according to the invention. The illustrated card 1 is a state driver’s license, although other identification cards could be alternatively used. As the sleeve 5 is sized to fit around an identification card, the sleeve 5 can be generally rectangular in shape. The sleeve 5 can optionally, but preferably, include a cutout 2 to facilitate insertion and possible removal of the card 1 from the sleeve 5. Also, a ring 7 can be disposed in one corner of the sleeve 5, which avoids damaging the card 1. This ring 7 is preferably connected to a flexible tether 10 that is used to retract the card and sleeve into the enclosure depicted in FIG. 2.

FIG. 2 is a front view of a sleeve 5 retractably removable from the opaque enclosure 15 according to the invention. The enclosure 15 depicted includes a small recess 17 that corresponds to the ring 7 of the sleeve 5 so as to receive the ring 7 when the sleeve 5 is fully retracted into the enclosure 15. The enclosure 15 has at least one fastening device (not shown) on the rear thereof to fix the enclosure on a belt 20.

FIG. 3 is a front cut-away view of an enclosure 15 showing a retraction mechanism 25 fixed inside the enclosure 15 according to the invention. In this view, a fastener 30 can be used to attach the entire enclosure 15 to a belt or other object or body part (not shown). The retraction mechanism 25 shown here is a spring-loaded reel assembly such as, described, for example, in prior references such as U.S. Pat. Nos. 1,262,005, 1,567,783 and 4,502,226, each of which is incorporated herein by express reference thereto for the purpose of enabling this embodiment for those of ordinary skill in the art. In well known manner, the tether 10 can be stored in position wound around the reel assembly 25 and the spring-loading of the reel is arranged to permit the tether 10 to be extended by being drawn off the reel assembly 25. The tether 10 is then enabled to be retracted by being rewound around the reel assembly 25 by action of stored spring tension. A retraction control device (not shown), can be included to permit the tether to be retained in the extended position with releasable control of retraction by activation of the control button.

The sleeve can be sized to permit the inclusion of multiple identification cards or separate sleeves can be used for each identification card. When separate sleeves are used, each can be configured and dimensioned for the identification card to be removably stored therein. For example, two sleeves can be sized respectively to receive a driver’s license and a passport. Alternatively, both identification cards can be placed in a single sleeve sufficiently configured and dimensioned to receive both. The identifying information would then preferably be arranged for easy display, such as by having the license face one direction in the sleeve and the relevant passport page facing the other direction. The sleeve can be made to retract with the relevant identification card depending on whether the user was traveling internationally or domestically. Alternatively, a license and a work- or school-related identification card can be used and displayed depending on where the user is traveling. Moreover, when two or more sleeves are used, the enclosure must be configured and dimensioned to receive all the sleeves, and the retraction mechanism can be attached to one or more of the sleeves and/or cards.

The term “about,” as used herein, should generally be understood to refer to both numbers in a range of numerals. Moreover, all numerical ranges herein should be understood to include each whole integer within the range.

Although preferred embodiments of the invention have been illustrated in the accompanying drawings and described in the foregoing Detailed Description, it will be understood that the invention is not limited to the embodiments disclosed, but is capable of numerous rearrangements and modifications of parts and elements without departing from the spirit of the invention. It will be understood that the mechanical details of every design may be slightly different or modified by one of ordinary skill in the art without departing from the teachings of the present invention.

What is claimed is:
1. A retractable identification-card holder comprising:
   a transparent sleeve that is configured and dimensioned to receive one or more identification cards;
   an opaque enclosure having an interior that is configured and dimensioned to removably store the sleeve and the one or more cards therein;
   a retraction mechanism that is operatively associated with the sleeve and the enclosure without damaging the one or more cards to facilitate the return of the sleeve and the one or more cards to the enclosure after being displayed by a user; and
at least one fastener operatively associated with the enclosure to attach the card holder to the user;
wherein at least one of the sleeve or the enclosure is sufficiently non-deformable to inhibit or avoid damage to the one or more cards.
2. The holder of claim 1, wherein the enclosure is fastened in a fixed position on at least one of: a part of the user, a piece of clothing on the user, a backpack, a purse, a briefcase, a pouch, a money belt, a suitcase, or a combination thereof.
3. The holder of claim 2, wherein the enclosure is wearable and is fastened on a belt, belt buckle, belt loop, or around a user’s neck.
4. The holder of claim 1, wherein the at least one fastener comprises a hook and loop type closure, a clip, a cord, or a combination thereof sufficient to securely fasten the holder to the desired fixed position.
5. The holder of claim 1, wherein the retraction mechanism comprises a spring-loaded reel assembly.
6. The holder of claim 5, wherein the reel assembly is disposed inside the enclosure and the retraction mechanism comprises a flexible tether connected at one end to the reel assembly and at the other end to the sleeve, the card, or both, and is arranged to be selectively extended from an opening in the enclosure and retracted into a position wound around the reel assembly after being temporarily removed.
7. The holder of claim 1, wherein the flexible tether comprises a string, a cord, a line, flexible tape, metal chain, or a combination thereof.
8. The holder of claim 7, wherein the flexible tether comprises a line having at least one thread or filament and comprising a polyamide polymer.
9. The holder of claim 6, wherein the flexible tether is attached at the other end to the sleeve by a split ring device therein and further comprising at least one additional sleeve to store and display at least one of the one or more identification cards.
10. The holder of claim 1, wherein the card holder is configured and dimensioned to store only a single identification card.
11. The holder of claim 1, wherein the enclosure is sufficiently non-deformable and the sleeve is deformable.
12. The holder of claim 11, wherein the enclosure is made of metal comprising stainless steel, tin, bronze, brass, aluminum, or a combination thereof.
13. The holder of claim 1, wherein the enclosure is sufficiently opaque to avoid viewing any information on the one or more cards while in the enclosure.
14. The holder of claim 1, wherein the enclosure is sufficiently opaque to avoid viewing any information on any of the cards while in the enclosure and the sleeve is transparent to permit viewing of the card therein once the sleeve is temporarily removed from the enclosure.
15. The holder of claim 1, wherein the enclosure has no lid and a permanent opening in an upward facing direction to facilitate frequent removal and retraction of the sleeve and each card with the opening configured and dimensioned to minimize inadvertent removal of the sleeve and each card from the enclosure.
16. An identification-card holder comprising:
a transparent sleeve that is configured and dimensioned to receive one or more identification cards;
an opaque enclosure having an interior that is configured and dimensioned to store the sleeve and the one or more cards therein and having a pivotably openable portion to display one or more cards; and
at least one fastener operatively associated with the enclosure to attach the card holder to a user or their clothing;
wherein at least one of the sleeve or the enclosure is sufficiently non-deformable to inhibit or avoid damage to each card.
17. The holder of claim 16, wherein the pivotably openable portion comprises a hinge across the top or bottom of the holder and a portion of the enclosure that covers the one or more identification cards and opens the enclosure to an open state to permit viewing of the one or more cards.
18. The holder of claim 16, wherein the pivotably openable portion comprises a spring mechanism arranged to return the openable portion to a closed state to inhibit viewing of the one or more cards.
19. A method of displaying an identification card comprising:
providing one or more identification cards retained in a transparent article which is retractably disposed in an opaque article attached to the user or the user’s clothing;
removing the transparent article having the one or more cards retained therein from the opaque article; and
displaying the transparent article so as to see at least one of the one or more identification cards.
20. The method of claim 19, which further comprises retracting the transparent article into the opaque article to prohibit undesired viewing of the one or more cards therein.